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NT 640 Exegesis of General Epistles

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NT 640 THE GENERAL EPISTLES (revised 12/11/07)

Dr. Ben Witherington, III

Class Time: 8-9:15 a.m. Tuesdays/Thursdays

Office Hours: Tuesday-Thursday 1-2 p.m.

CATALOG DESCRIPTION

A close reading of the General Epistles with special attention given to literary, socio-historical, and theological understandings of the Epistles. May include from any or all the General Epistles in a given semester. Pre-requisites IBDS 510 or 511; NT 520 and NT 500-501/2 or equivalent. (May be taken by students in M.A. programs not requiring Greek by special arrangement with the professor).

Introduction

The General Epistles are unfortunately the most neglected documents in the New Testament. This course will examine in detail the social, rhetorical, theological and ethical character of several of these documents—in this case James, Jude, 1 Peter, and 2 Peter. The lectures will be based on the Greek text of these documents, not a specific English translation. The student is advised to bring their Greek NT to class, and a good modern translation, preferably the TNIV. We will be doing some translating along the way.

Course Objectives

Having successfully completed this course, participants should:

- (1) be able to recognize the importance of a close reading of the text of the General Epistles
- (2) be able to begin to master the skills necessary to exegete the Greek text of this NT document;
- (3) grasp the importance of the rhetorical structure of these works and their contribution to NT thought;
- (4) understand the role of these works in the New Testament canon;
- (5) Be able to propose fruitful ways in which these documents may be read within the horizons of the contemporary church and world; understand the importance of these documents for the Wesleyan theology.
- (6) to employ a range of exegetical approaches relevant to the interpretation of these documents
- (7) to be able to identify central issues in the critical study of one or more of these documents
- (8) to be able to articulate the central theological assumptions and presuppositions one brings to the interpretation of books like these
- (9) to be able to critically assess commentaries and secondary literature, learning to distinguish between scholarly and devotional treatments of these documents
- (10) to be able to understand these books in its social, historical, rhetorical, and canonical contexts

Course Requirements and Reading

On questions of style, especially with regard to paper organization and references, see Carol Slade, Form and Style: Research Papers, Reports, Theses, 11th ed. (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2000). The Chicago Manual of Style can also be used. Footnotes are preferred to either endnotes or parenthetical notation.

Students should submit written materials on time; late papers will receive no written comments and the grade will be penalized one-third of a grade per day.

Class Preparation, Attendance, and Participation: Participants should prepare for each class session by (1) carefully reading the assigned portions of the book in question in advance of class, (2) taking notes on the text, and (3) comparing their observations with those in appropriate commentary. (15%). Towards the end of the semester I will be coming around during class to see that you have done this in your notebooks.

Ben Witherington, Letters and Homilies for Jewish Christians (Hebrews, James and Jude), (IV Press, 2007). hb

Ben Witherington, Letters and Homilies for Hellenized Christians Vol. 2 (1 and 2 Peter), (IV Press, January 2008). hb

William Brosend, James and Jude, (Cambridge: Cambridge U. Press, 2004).

Joel B. Green, 1 Peter, (Two Horizons Biblical Commentary Series) (Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2007) pb.

N.B. All of these commentaries should be read during the course of the term, working through them as we work through the books themselves. We will be working through James, then Jude, then 1 Peter and finally 2 Peter, in that order during the semester.

Attendance at all sessions of the course is expected. In order to complete the course with a passing grade, no more than two classes may be missed.

(2) A Critical Review: A comparison and contrast of the two works listed below:

This review should be approximately 1300-1600 words (i.e., 5-6 pages, with a standard 12-point font like Times New Roman and one-inch margins) in length, typed, double-spaced. **Due at the beginning of the first class in March.** As a critical review, this essay should summarize the author's central theses about 2 Peter and Jude; demonstrate the author's approach to the subject matter; and critique the author's analysis (e.g., with regard to the author's method, its faithfulness to the primary materials, its engagement with the wider discussion on the topic, and so on). (35%)

The book to be reviewed this term is Peter Davids, The Letters of 2 Peter and Jude (Pillar Commentary Series), (Eerdmans, 2006).

(3) A Research Assignment: An exegesis paper of approximately 10 pages (with a standard 12-point font like Times New Roman and one-inch margins), typed, with 1.5 or double spacing, with appropriate notes and bibliography, treating a selected pericope of James, Jude, 1 Peter or 2 Peter.. This paper should evidence *both* a close reading of the text *and* critical engagement with the range of secondary resources appropriate to the study. (See the bibliographic resources in the commentaries, as well as *New Testament Abstracts* in the Library.) **Due by 4:00 April 1.** (50%).

Reading Schedule

The student should plan to work through the commentaries as we progress through the course.

Course Schedule

Approximately one week will be spent on introductory matters then we will deal with the James, then Jude, then 1 Peter, then 2 Peter. *A one page reading report is required to be submitted by May 1, detailing exactly how much of the required reading has been completed.*

Bibliography

There are now several resources one can turn to as guides for selecting commentaries and secondary literature for the preparation of research papers as well as for ministry. The best of these is D.R. Bauer, An Annotated Guide to Biblical Resources for Ministry, (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2003).

A grade of "I" denotes that the work of a course has not been completed due to an unavoidable emergency, which does not include delinquency or attending to church work or other employment. If the work of a course is incomplete at the end of a term without an emergency, a letter grade will be given based on the grades of work done, with incomplete work counted as "F." See ATS 2007-08 Online Catalog page 31.